

when white fireworks erupt and my heart is whole again by dannydebito

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Angst, Romance

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-07-08 20:32:44

Updated: 2019-07-08 20:32:44

Packaged: 2019-12-12 18:50:27

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,542

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: El and Mike hadn't gone on a proper date in. . . ever. And 4th of July was supposed to hold a romantic night with beautiful fireworks and relaxing alone time, right? Only, El had no idea what fireworks were, and wasn't exactly prepared for all that came with them.

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The gentle hues of warm oranges and pinks illuminated the night sky that rested over the hilltop the young pair were nestled on, their bodies close to keep each other warm during the unnaturally chilly July night. it wasn't just any July night - it was the fourth of july. which meant barbecues, a lot of adults drinking alcohol, and fireworks.

El wasn't. . . entirely sure what fireworks were. The others had tried - they really did try - to explain what they were, but all she had in her mind was a vague ball of colors and sparks in the air? She wasn't entirely sure what the excitement over them was, or why the others had insisted that Mike and El watch them alone, but she was growing more and more interested as they waited for the sky to grow dark.

They were currently sitting together on a throw blanket, their feet bumping against each others as they bobbed their heads to the only slightly static-y tune that played through the radio Mike had brought with him. He'd occasionally sing the words under his breath and she would find herself becoming completely transfixed every time - he really could sing. She wasn't tone-deaf when she told him she didn't 'like it' last time. He often sung her to sleep over their ham radios, and she found an immense comfort in the sound.

Her head dozily fell onto his shoulder, her eyes closing in content as the song continued to play. This. . . was the song they had danced to at the snowball, wasn't it? That only made her chest feel even more fuzzy. She wrapped her arms around his warm, tugging him closer to her as she too began to hum to the song. This was one of her favorites - it reminded her of a happy time. A time where she felt. . . safe. And comfortable.

She hadn't realized he had stopped singing until the music rift kicked in and she could no longer hum. Her eyes flickered up to look at him, a warm blush washing over her cheeks when she saw him gazing at her. ". . . yes?"

He just chuckled quietly under his breath, brushing some of her hair behind her hair. She instinctively leaned into his touch, nuzzling his hand with a small sigh. she shook his head, brushing his thumb along her cheekbone before delicately resting his hand against her burning cheeks. "You're just. . . cute," he glanced off, a sheepish smile slipping onto his lips. "I don't tell you that enough."

"I'm. . . cute?" she cocked her head to the side, her flushed cheeks tingling more with each word he said. "Like. . . a kitten?"

Another chuckle left his lips, though this one sounded a little more nervous. "No, no - well, yes, definitely - but you're honestly just really cute in general. You may be the most badass and bitchin' person I know, but you're also really cute. It's a good thing, I promise."

She nodded at him slowly, a smile slipping onto her lips as she admired each of his features that were being highlighted by the dimming lights from the sky. She adored the way his freckles crawled along his nose and cheeks, and how soft and fluffy his hair always looked. She loved how dark his eyes were and how wide and genuine his smile would get when he was happy. She just. . . love him. She glanced down at the towel to keep her head from spinning out of control, shrugging slightly. "You. . . are cute, too." She spoke after a moment, her hands absently fiddling with a loose piece of thread on the blanket.

"You think so?" He smiled fondly at her, a rush of embarrassment waving over him. Sure, cute was something that would probably something the others would harass him for, but. . . coming from El? He kind of liked the compliment. "I'm glad you think so. You're my girlfriend, after all. It'd be weird if you didn't."

"Weird?"

"I'm just teasing," he trailed his fingertips along his jaw, his eyes absently dropping to her lips. He swore that every time he looked they were pinker and softer. It was like magic. He gave her a gentle smile as he cupped her cheek and pulled her into a kiss filled with nothing short of absolute adoration, his other hand lacing fingers with hers as if letting go would separate them forever. Their lips had learned to move in (almost) flawless harmony and their bodies knew

just how they should be positioned. Kissing came just as naturally to them as breathing - it made sense, it was all they did for six months straight.

They didn't pull away until they both desperately needed to breathe, both retreating with a blush and a pleased smile, though they didn't break eye contact. She gingerly squeezed his hand, and he began to brush his thumb along her knuckles. She smiled at him, her head tilted fondly.

"I love you, Mike." She pulled on his hand a bit as she leaned up to sneak another gentle kiss onto his lips, her smile growing at his lack of reaction due to the surprise. She still got nervous saying it, and he still got nervous hearing it. But they both loved saying it anyways.

He snuck another quick peck on her lips, nuzzling his nose against hers before resting his forehead on hers. "I love you too, el."

They stayed like that for a moment - completely engulfed in just how serene it was to be alone sometimes. They were trying to be less. . . clingy with each other, especially around everyone else, but there were times where basking in the feeling was almost euphoric, and they knew they deserved the alone time every so often.

It wasn't until the faint sound of a crowd cheering was heard that the two pulled apart, both of their attention turning to the dimly-lit town that sat below them. Mike sat up a bit straighter, and El slowly followed suit, looking around curiously.

"What. . . what's going on?" She turned to look at him, though fell silent at the excited shine in his eyes. ". . . Fireworks?"

More cheering was heard after a muffled voice spoke through a microphone, and her mind was growing more curious with each second that led up to the event, especially since all Mike did in response was nod enthusiastically. She had no idea what she should expect - but his expression told her that it was something special.

There was a sharp sound - almost like a hiss - that followed after a brief silence. She glanced over at Mike once again, a smile slipping onto her lips at the excitement shining on his face. He sat leaning just

the slightest bit, his hands on the ground in front of him and his legs crossed along each other. She absolutely adored seeing him excited. The last time she saw him like this was during the last Star Wars movie release.

She was about to reach out and wrap her arms around his arm when it happened.

Boom!

A sound that pierced through her body like a shot of electricity roared through the sky, followed by a continuous train of booms. She could feel her heart pounding against her chest as her hands shot over her ears and her knees slid up to her chest, almost in a fetal position. Her head ached with the sound of blood rushing to her ears, and she hadn't noticed Mike attempting to talk to her or the tears running down her cheeks until he grabbed her wrists and shook her gently, breaking her out of her frantic pain. She hesitantly opened her eyes, searching his for the warmth and comfort that they always brought.

"What. . . what was that?" She whimpered, her hands still clutching her ears as if they would fall off if she didn't. It was loud. it sounded. . . dangerous.

His expression was filled with pity and guilt, his eyes desperately scanning her face as his fingers rested on top of hers and his thumbs brushed along her wrists. "I'm so sorry, El. God, I should have warned you about the sounds - I totally forgot about them."

"The. . . sounds?" She pushed harder on her ears when another muffled explosion went off behind him, a faint whine escaping her lips as she squirmed a bit, sinking lower into the blanket. She'd be laying down were it not for his hands keeping her up. "I don't like the sounds, Mike. They remind me of. . . they remind me all of the bad things that have happened. And. . . being with Papa."

She hadn't said that name in a long, long time. Not many people could handle her talking about Papa - Hops loved her and took care of her like no one else could, but she couldn't bear to talk to him about it. She felt. . . guilty, sometimes. She had a loving father now,

she had nothing to complain about. But Mike. . . Mike liked to listen. He understood. They always understood each other.

His expression sunk even more as he licked his lips and searched his mind for any hints at how to help her. God, this was his fault. He didn't even think to fucking warn her? "I'm so sorry, El. he's not here, I promise. He's gone. It's just you and me, and the fireworks won't hurt you."

She just shook her head, her eyes shut tight and her breathing becoming unsteady and shaky. So, so many times she had to hear the sound of gunshots. As a threat to her. A threat to those who 'took care of her'. The last sound so many of the people she grew up with heard. She didn't like the booms. She didn't like the echoes. She didn't like that no matter how much she plugged her ears, it was still faint. It was just like being locked in that room, listening to gunshots and screams all over again.

A soft brush against her cheek made her breath catch in her throat, her eyes slowly flickering open to find Mike's face resting against hers, his arms engulfing her in a protective hug as he mumbled 'I'm so sorry' after each one. She hadn't even felt him grab her and pull her into his lap, but that's where she was; draped halfway onto his lap with her legs folded carefully at his feet. Her hand quivering up to his chest. She could feel his heartbeat against her fingertips, and it almost drowned out the sounds around them. Almost.

They took another few minutes to hold each other, her breath gradually beginning to steady, though it would hitch and leave a tight twist in her throat when another boom would happen. She knew she was safe. Nothing was going to hurt her - not right now. Not with Mike. She hadn't had Mike when she was stuck with Papa. She hadn't had any of her friends waiting for her if she needed them when she was with Papa. The thought of all of them made her face relax just the slightest bit.

He was still muttering apologies every so often, and she could hear the worry in his voice through the booms and the cheering from below them. She shook her head again, this time directing it towards him. "It's. . . okay. You didn't know it would hurt me." He trailed her fingertips along his chest delicately, as if dancing along to the beat.

Her lips quipped into the slightest hint of a smile.

"I- I should have thought about it, though. Of course loud sounds like that would scare the shit out of you - I was just thinking about how pretty they were." He bounced a bit in his spot, hesitating for only a second before gingerly grabbing her hands, pulling them off of his chest and placing them on his cheeks instead. "You're okay, El. I promise. I'm right here. This is real, okay? This." He left a tender kiss on her lips, his forehead resting on hers. She kept her eyes open despite his closing, searching his face with a love she felt growing deeper each second.

"This." She whispered. It was never going to be that easy - she knew that. They both did. They both knew that, even years from now, these things would still hurt her. But she. . . could try not to mind. At least for the time being. "This." She repeated softly, smiling at him when he eventually opened his eyes. Even in the dark, she could see his cheeks tinge just the slightest bit. And then a boom followed, and light illuminated his face, and god, he looked beautiful. Reds and oranges shined down on his dark hair and his freckles almost glowed in the newfound light.

"Cute." She whispered, her eyebrows creasing in thought. "Pretty. You. . . look pretty in this light."

He looked at her fondly, though she could see that he was taken aback in his eyes. They always widened just the slightest bit. "You-you look really pretty. you look beautiful, honestly. your dress looks really nice and you look cute in make-up! not. . . that you actually need it to look cute and - i didn't even know you knew how to do it, honestly."

Her head fell bashfully, a smile consistently growing the more he spoke. "I'm learning. Hops said it was okay as long as none of it was smudged when I come home."

He stared at her with nothing but terror in his eyes, his eyes immediately falling onto her lips that he had already kissed a lot since they sat on the hilltop. She winked at him, pulling out a small tube of lipstick that she had hid in her shoe before rushing out of her house with Hops. He only looked a little more relaxed. She giggled at

the concern in his eyes, nudging into his arm before another, quieter boom interrupted her.

Her fits of giggles carefully died down as her eyes flickered from his face to the lights above them, her lips parting in surprise at the colors that were floating around the night sky. The boom that followed almost didn't startle her once she watched the colors follow after it - once she got completely lost in the smoke and the designs they left amongst the stars. Her hand naturally found its way to his, and he squeezed her hand delicately, scanning her expression and demeanor for any signs of panic. But she. . . appreciated that the booms were followed by a surprise. A surprise that was colorful and exciting. A surprise that made her feel in awe.

Her eyes, for the hundredth time that night, fell onto her boyfriend's face. And another smile curled onto her lips as he, too, stared at the fireworks.

A surprise that made her feel. . . happy.